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THE EVANGELICAL SOCIAL CONGRESS IN GERMANY.¹

THE Evangelical Social Congress in Germany is a unique institution. No other country, so far as I know, has produced a similar society. An association of men and women who are held together by the desire "to make fruitful the forces of faith and love in contest with the social evils and dangers of the age," may count upon interest in all places where similar tasks are undertaken with different means. The experience and development of this society is typical of what may be accomplished in this field by "Christian Socialism," and may prove instructive for other countries.

The first period of the Congress is now at its end. This stage is marked by the resignation of the former president, by the fact that for a full half-year a new president was sought in vain, and that, at last, the celebrated church historian, Professor Harnack, in November of last year, consented to accept the position. During the half-year while the search for a president was going on, the possibilities of the future were carefully considered. It was proposed by some to dissolve the Congress and give its work to one of the other organizations which had inscribed social reform upon their banners—the Society for Social Politics, whose leader is Professor Schmoller, or, better still, the Society for Social Reform, which was founded by the former Prussian minister, Freiherr von Berlepsch, in the year 1901. The conviction was frequently expressed that the Congress had fulfilled the greater part of its task; that there was no urgent reason for its continuance; there was much discouragement among the leaders, and the difficulties were great.

Apparently the obstacles have been for the time overcome; for while such a man as Harnack stands at the head of the Congress there will be no lack of celebrated orators and enthusiastic hearers. The Congress may live for a decade on the world-wide

¹ Translated by C. R. HENDERSON.

fame of its president. Whether the internal difficulties can be overcome is a question.

In order to understand these difficulties we must recall the course of the development of the Congress during the thirteen years of its existence. What did it seek to achieve? What has actually been done? What can we assert to be the result of its labors?

The Congress was founded at Whitsuntide in the year 1890. That year was the beginning of a new internal policy in Germany. It was the year in which William II. began to act as his own chancellor. On March 20 he had dismissed Prince Bismarck; on October 1 the so-called "Socialist Laws" expired, and Social Democracy was no longer a crime; on February 4 William II. had already published his social message, in which he promised to further the demands of the workingmen for legal protection; and at the same time he called Freiherr von Berlepsch to be his minister. In brief, it seemed that after the oppressive measures of Bismarck a time of conciliation had arrived, and of social help and reform. The highest church authority in Prussia, the Prussian superior church council, urged the clergy to give attention to the social question, and to go into the assemblies of the socialists and discuss with them religion and patriotism.

Out of this hopeful sentiment the Evangelical Social Congress was born. Clergymen and laymen came together to form a society which should aid the church to co-operate in the social reform movement, to prepare the way and to clarify thought. In Germany every work of this kind meets obstacles, not only in conflicting social views, but also in the divisions of theological doctrines, the splitting of scientific theology into various schools, and the deep chasm which sunders almost all ecclesiastical groups. The historical and critical labors of theological science and the traditional creed of the popular church hinder common practical work and keep alive suspicion. It was a great and promising beginning for the Evangelical Social Congress that the leader of scientific theology, Professor Harnack, and one of the chief leaders of the orthodox clergy, Court Preacher Stöcker, joined hands. It was upon Stöcker's proposal that the Congress adopted the

broad platform on which men of almost all tendencies could stand. For president a member of the middle party, a layman, was chosen.

The fundamental idea of all tendencies was: "to investigate the social conditions of our people without prejudice, to test them by the standard of the moral and religious requirements of the gospel, and to make this gospel itself more fruitful for our economic life." That was the goal. In what way it could be reached, to what particular program it might lead, there was no generally accepted opinion. It was precisely the purpose of the congress to clarify the fundamental thought, and work a way toward particular practical measures.

Has this end been attained during the thirteen years of the life of the Congress? Is there any unified evangelical-social program? Are there demands on which all Evangelical Christians can unite? And has legislation at any point been set in motion by means of the discussions of the Congress? All these questions must today be answered in the negative. Even more: the only result of the work of the Congress has been the proof that an evangelical-social program for specific Christian social measures, derived from the nature of Christianity by a necessary logic, is impossible. Various and conflicting as have been the themes and arguments of the discussion, all come to the conclusion that an economic program cannot be deduced from Christianity; that Christianity cannot be used to further the present industrial order nor to destroy socialism. "Christianity is independent of the economic system, and is consistent with any form of economic life. The economic order has its own laws and is independent of Christianity" (Professor Kaftan, 1893). "To oppose the economic ends for which workingmen strive, under the leadership of Social Democracy, in the name of Christianity, would be un-Christian" (Professor Herrmann, 1892). It remains to the church and the pastors, as the representatives of the Christian point of view, to remind men that the development of moral personality should not suffer under social wrongs; they should call attention to such evils as obstruct the development of a moral life; but it is outside the peculiar duty of the church

and of Christianity to point out the particular methods of improvement. "In respect to special social-economical measures (state ownership, land reform, labor hours, price regulations, taxation, insurance, labor unions, etc.) the church cannot form a party, nor compel its members to take a side; since a decision of these questions demands expert knowledge which has nothing to do with Christianity, and the power of the state is required" (Harnack, 1894). "Since the social life has its own laws, and is conditioned by the general conditions of life and culture, the church must leave the problem of social measures to those whose special training makes them responsible" (Pastor von Soden, 1896).

These expressions interpret the fundamental idea of the Congress, that the economic life of the present should be helpfully influenced by the forces of the Gospel. These powers cannot be transformed into a fixed program; the church cannot be used as a political party for pushing a reform. The only practical duty remaining is the care of parish life and the testing of social conditions by moral principles. A working program for action the Congress no longer has; it is now only a society for formulating ethical instruction, for awakening conscience and sympathy; but not a group for carrying out a plan of action.

This was a necessary order of development. At the first many of the members were eager to proceed at once to some practical effort; but this impulse did not find expression after the second session. Ever more decisively was the purely inspiring and ethical character of the goal of the Congress emphasized. A principal reason was the broad platform which the Congress was compelled to adopt if it did not at once dash itself on the rocks of partisan interests. But this very ecumenical character made practical effort impossible. Whoever will represent social-political demands must plunge into the strife of political parties and defend his measures. Very soon we should have been driven to Social Democracy, because no other party had taken up the desired measures. But the un-Christian factor in Social Democracy made this impossible; and the participants in the Congress remained members of their own political parties. The

composition of the Congress made it impossible to take up specific measures.

Even more plainly it was made clear by the discussions that the New Testament expressly excludes the direct derivation of specific social demands from its teachings. The problems of social and economic organization, before which we now stand, have nothing in common with the relations of trade and property with which Jesus or Paul had to do. Profound study of the views of early Christians showed that they cannot be used for comparison with those formed in the presence of our duties and difficulties. The primitive mode of thinking has been set aside by better historical knowledge of the past and better economic understanding of the present. In close connection with addresses before the Congress other developments may be noted. For example, a lecture of the jurist, Professor Sohm, in the general assembly of the Society for Inner Missions, in 1895; the foundation of the National Social Society, in 1896, which, after warm discussion of two days, declined to call itself "Christian Social;" and the book of Pastor Frederick Naumann which he wrote after his Palestinian travels (*Asia*, 1899). Naumann had been formerly one of the most earnest representatives of a socialism which was derived directly from the teachings of Jesus. His book *Jesus as Man of the People* is the classic of this view in Germany. But as early as 1896 Naumann openly revealed his change of attitude at the founding of the National Social Society. In the volume *Asia*, and in some places in his political work *Democracy and Emperor*, published a year later, he has given reasons for this change. In viewing the oriental countries, which recall Jesus to mind, these doubts occur to him:

Many of his words would not fit the present population. "Give to him who asks, and turn not away from him who will borrow from thee," sounds out of place when one has to do with these beggars of Olivet. The sentence, "Behold the fowls of the air, etc.," makes a strong impression when read in modern Palestine. Could Jesus talk in that way to a people to whom it must be preached: Go to the colonies of German Templars and see how they work! Your Heavenly Father feeds them; since they work with sweat upon their brows; they plow deep, make drains, build roads, provide wholesome

food, improve the water supply, clothe themselves decently! Did Jesus have a people before him whose culture aspirations were so strong that a counterweight was needed? Jesus went and came on the roads without doing anything for their improvement. The Jesus we think of went about in a well-ordered country and conciliated classes by the spirit of brotherhood. That he was in a country where the very beginnings of progress were wanting, and that he had no word for progress, came forcibly to me when I read the New Testament with the eyes of an oriental traveler. I lost something which had value for me—the earthly Helper who sees all forms of human need. He who has acquired the habit of thinking on social questions must regard these roads from the standpoint of Christian action. Did Jesus speak of patience or of renovation? Did he have our ideals of culture? Had he any ideals of culture? Did he seek to heal the poverty of Palestine or only to mitigate evils by alms and miracles? Up to this time I had seen in all helpful, organized activities the working of the life of Jesus. In this social conception much of truth remains; but in Palestine the certainty of it is lost.¹

Thus an understanding of history deepened by geographical observation has led out of Christian Socialism exactly that man who formerly was its most brilliant and passionate representative.

One is obliged to carry the questioning farther and ask if some ideas of primitive Christianity are not positively opposed to the socialism of today. The historian knows that primitive Christianity not only did not move a finger to change social order, but required the individual to submit to that order as God-given and God-willed, including slavery. In Christian antiquity, in the Middle Ages, and even in Luther's time every thought of reform which went beyond individual benevolence and asked for change in general laws was a sin and an offense. It was first on English soil and in the seventeenth century that the idea of emancipation of slaves introduced Christian social reforms. But in all pulpits even now patience, submission, contentment are praised as special Christian virtues; and our workmen, who feel in their hearts that they have a moral right to emancipation, are rejected by Christianity and driven to materialism!

These difficulties have rarely been discussed in the Congress. Only once (1899) was there a distinct expression, and that was in the course of a debate after a lecture. A resolution was,

¹ *Asia*, pp. 113-15.

indeed, unanimously passed which asked that the professors of theological ethics should give more attention to these subjects, but no important results have followed. Whatever solution of such problems may be found, it is already clear that no scheme of social reform can be derived immediately from the New Testament. Not merely the constitution of the Congress, but its leading idea, forbids the hope of a common practical program of demands.

A third fact must be noted which has importance for the development of the Congress: the cessation of zealous interest for social questions among the Evangelical clergy. This is the principal cause of the difficulties under which the Congress labors. The cause of this decrease of social interest of the clergy lies in their external and internal relations. Interest in the labor question has diminished generally in the educated classes of the nation. The new imperialistic policy of Germany and the commercial questions of recent years have absorbed all other interests. The official policy of the government from 1894 to 1899 was directly unfriendly to the laborers, and the rise of tariff on food under the law of 1901 has injured the labor class economically. The emperor has sharply assailed the Social Democrats, and that has been taken as an attack on the labor movement itself. The superior council of the Prussian church in 1895 recalled its message of 1890 and warned the clergy against social activity. This explains the cooling of zeal among the clergy.

Furthermore, the pastors must have regard to the conditions in their parishes. If they are active in political strife, they cannot serve successfully as consolers and counselors for all members. Here and there a pastor is found who has kept up his former social enthusiasm; but the desire to maintain peaceful parish relations restrains them from public discussion. As secretary of the National Social Society I constantly met such pastors, and I grant that, from their standpoint, they were justified in the position they took. Those who most cling to the church are usually officials, who share the views of the government, and the small manufacturers and shopkeepers, the lower

stratum of the middle class. These are the people who constitute the church societies, whose wives join with the Frau Pastor in sewing circles, and who are most closely associated with the parson. And these are just the people who are affected by laws protecting wage-earners: for their business cannot bear more burdens. As in every association and party the attitude toward fundamental questions is decided by the mass of the members and not by individual leaders, so the position taken by the church is determined by that of those who most participate in its life. It must also be remembered that more than half the pastors are over country parishes where few industrials are found, and so they are but slightly affected by the modern labor question. The economic evils with which they are acquainted are chiefly those peculiar to peasants—heavy debts, foreign competition, backward methods. Therefore their interest is necessarily, and from their standpoint properly, drawn away from the labor question. Many young theologians, who at the university and during their candidacy were zealous advocates of Christian Socialism, have naturally become cooler, and finally have gone entirely over to the agrarian high-tariff side, after they have spent a year or so as parsons in an agricultural parish. This does not imply treason to their former convictions; it is rather the effect of the surroundings which always influence men.

For the Congress this situation made impossible a unified social policy of the entire church. There remained for it only the task of creating a feeling of duty and fraternal sympathy; but from this fact it followed that only pastors who were already inclined to study social problems were interested in the Congress. The Congresses have generally aroused intense temporary interest and enthusiasm, as at Frankfort-on-the-Main (1894), Erfurt (1895), Stuttgart (1896), Kiel (1899), Dortmund (1902); but they have left very little permanent result. Small and influential branches have been established in Württemberg and Holstein. Few of the addresses have had great importance in the literature of the subject. The most significant are:

1891—Professor Herrmann (theologian, follower of Albrecht

Ritschl): "Religion and Social Democracy," in which for the first time in Germany it was shown that socialism is not to be attacked because it is necessarily hostile to Christianity.

1892—Frederick Naumann (pastor, and since 1896 writer and president of the National Social Union): "Christianity and the Family," in which our ideals of marriage, as taught in theological ethics, are tested by actual economic conditions.

1894—Professor Max Weber (economist) and Pastor Paul Göhre (left the pastorate in 1897, and in 1900 became a Social Democrat): "The Agricultural Labor Question in East Prussia." This lecture rested on an investigation started by the Congress, and the results were published by it. It had the effect of awakening the passionate enmity of the Conservative party against the Christian Socialists.

1895—Mrs. Gnauk-Kühne: "The Woman Question." It was the first time that a woman had spoken in a general ecclesiastical assembly. The lecture has permanent value. Since that time the author has become a Roman Catholic.

1898—Pastor Rade (editor of the *Christian World*): "The Religious and Moral World of Thought of the Modern Wage-Worker," an address which drew upon new materials in the writings of Social Democrats, and gives a valuable contribution to the psychology of the modern industrial.

This list will indicate how small a number of really fundamental, pioneer, and novel papers has been produced. During the last four years nothing has been added to the list. Of course, there have been addresses which handled grave questions and aroused deep feeling; but none to compare with those mentioned for power to arouse discussion in journals and books. Even Harnack's address (1902) on the "Moral and Social Significance of Modern Tendencies of Culture," deeply as it affected the hearers, has not been noticed publicly.

The membership of the Congress has never remained very long over 800. It increased up to 1896, then it stood still, and later declined. In the spring of 1902 there were 779 members. The income of the Congress the first year was about 3,000 marks; in the second less, and later it has fluctuated between 4,000 and

5,000 marks. Anyone who has had experience with organizations knows that not much can be done with such small means. They barely suffice to pay a secretary for managing the finances, the cost of the annual meetings, and the monthly bulletin whose circulation does not extend beyond the members. Formerly the entire time of a secretary was employed, but now a young clergyman in Berlin is paid 1,200 marks and gives but part of his time. This shows that the Congress has not its former strength. The Congress may continue as long as it has already lived, but there is no prospect of its pursuing a vigorous and aggressive policy.

External difficulties are also adding to the burden. This Congress is not the only organization which is interested in social politics. The Union for Social Politics was established even earlier (1872), includes most of the German Economists, and once in two years holds great and enthusiastic assemblies, with important papers, and has already published over one hundred volumes of information about social conditions. In January, 1900, the former Minister von Berlepsch founded the Union for Social Reform which proposed to hold a meeting once in two years and which publishes brochures on social topics. Great manufacturers, merchants, members of the imperial legislature, and professors have joined him; and all seek direct influence on legislation. The Evangelical Social Congress differs from both these societies in its principle of regarding social conditions from the religious and ecclesiastical standpoint; and yet more than two-thirds of the papers thus far read are not specially religious in contents, but have regarded economic problems from a purely scientific point of view; and on this ground it meets the competition of the other societies.

Further, we must take into account the fact that the Congress has lost its "ecumenical" character. It no longer includes all parties of theological science and of the church, but now it is an organization of those who belong to the critical and historical school, and this is manifest in the election of Harnack as president, although it was already clear in 1896. In 1896 Stöcker left the Congress and with his friends founded the Church Social Conference, an association which stood on theologically ortho-

dox ground, and is in closer touch with church circles than the Congress and has more direct practical aims. It has not the strength of the Congress in thought, great names, and scientific economists; but in practical work it has already accomplished more than the Congress.

Last summer friends of the Congress freely said among themselves that the task of the Congress is done, that there is no longer any necessity for keeping it up, and that the obstacles were too great for its further action. This feeling is now overcome, and the members are taking hold with new zeal because the name of the president is a strong basis for further labor. But other difficulties still exist and give occasion for serious thought as to the future purpose and method of the Congress.

It is certain that the association cannot unite on a political program for agitation and action, and just as clear that mere appeals to enthusiasm will not long hold men together. Membership will not grow on such ground. In order to sustain the organization the Congress must discover some specific aim which will compel interest.

The socialist finds stumbling-blocks in Christianity. He knows that society develops according to law; that it is impossible to apply to our capitalistic economy legal and ethical norms which had a good meaning in times of the small and local industry; that moral ideas change from age to age with economic conditions; and he carries in his own heart an unshaken belief in the righteousness of his own battle for emancipation and the struggle for political power. But the Christian church introduces into its sermons and teachings a series of principles and norms which arose out of past conditions and do not fit our own. In the great cities numerous pastors feel the stress of these objections; they look to the Congress to show them a way to reconcile traditional ethics with contemporary moral feelings. In their Sunday sermons, their religious teaching, their voluntary activity in societies and care of souls, they need standards of judgment, principles, general rules which they themselves are not able to work out, because they have not the time for profound reflection nor the necessary knowledge.

In the Evangelical Social Congress the men are united who could earnestly undertake this task. Exactly at this time, when the Congress has, approximately, a unity of theological views, could it enter upon this task, because the historical and critical labors of theology are the presupposition for such an undertaking, only this theological school is in a position to carry on the historical method from theology into ethics.

But such a work cannot be accomplished with one or two lectures. It is necessary to go into details, and to discuss particular moral and economic ideas, occupation and gain, usury laws and fair price, contentment and existing legal regulations, the worth of personality and the economic basis for a sound family life, property and labor, the wages conflict and the Ten Commandments, and much more, in order to enable the sermon to go to the core of reality and conduct.

There are also many questions which relate to the church as an external institution: administration of property, ecclesiastical taxes, and the like. The question must be met, whether the traditional practice is defensible or not from the standpoint of society. For example, in the city of Schöneberg, near Berlin, during recent years, the church as landlord has acted contrary to the common welfare like any common speculator, and there are instances in other cities. Such facts must be collected and criticised. New principles for the management of church property must be sought. The Evangelical Social Congress, a union of theologians and economists, is in a position to do this work.

Both forms of the problem are in the ecclesiastical field. If they are made prominent in the Congress, then the purely economic and political themes must retire to the background. That would be no loss, because, as already shown, there are other organizations to take up these themes. The peculiar territory of the Congress lies in Christian ethics and social history, and this ground it must cultivate if it would show proof of right to exist.

I cannot say whether Professor Harnack has the intention to guide the Congress in this direction. At present it seems that the meeting this year in Darmstadt will follow former lines.

Perhaps necessity will urge to this course in future. Some of the difficulties in the way of the Congress are peculiar to Germany; but many are felt by Evangelical Christianity in all capitalistic countries, and therefore this account of the development of our Evangelical Social Congress may have instruction for the church in other countries. At least this is the purpose of the present article.

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